



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:
PARTNERS OF FRONTLINE HEALTHCARE WORKERS (HCW)
Version 2, 4/20/20

If your partner is on the frontline of the healthcare response to COVID-19, you are facing a unique and challenging set of emotional experiences and practical problems. Having a loved one working day in and day out in a healthcare setting may add distress to an already turbulent and unsettling time. As such, COVID-19 is a major outside stressor on a relationship and relationship issues may feel more acute or intense because of the pandemic. There may be a loss of normalcy due to loss of your loved one's time, energy, openness, and safety, etc. As your HCW partner dives into their work with COVID-19, you may find you also have more to cope with in terms of your own fears of getting infected, an overwhelming sense of anxiety, profound isolation, or demands placed on you to take care of everything in the home and with the children and other family members. You and your partner may feel like you are in different worlds with different realities. To help you navigate these challenging times for yourself and with your partner, here are some tips. Helpful resources also are included.

Engage in Practices to Keep Yourself Healthy

- Maintain as many of your usual self-care practices as you can
- Relax your expectations for yourself - what you are being asked to do is HARD.
- Lean on other relationships in your life, especially if your HCW partner is your usual go-to
 - Try to connect regularly with other important people in your circle
 - Lean heavily on them
- Accept help from others—food delivery, grocery delivery, reduced work schedule for yourself
- Limit social media use
 - Choose 1-2 trusted new sources and stick with them
 - Do not read endlessly about the trials, tribulations, morbidity and mortality of HCWs
- Trust your HCW partner as much as you can that they are using their best judgment and engaging in best practices
- Ask for information from your HCW about their work and schedule so that you can have realistic expectations
- Remember it is still okay to have your own needs and to be disappointed if they are not met



Engage in Practices to Keep Your Family Member Healthy

- Help them stay healthy
 - Encourage sleep, exercise, good eating
 - Cook meals for them or send them and their team food delivery at work
 - Encourage them to take breaks from COVID-19
- Talk with them about what they are going through
 - Ask your partner about their day - Find out what was hardest, what was best, what were they scared about
 - Listen to their stories
 - Help calm their fears and anxieties
 - Let them know if you notice any changes of concern to you
- Manage your own worries so your HCW partner does not feel they need to take care of you and thus cannot turn to you for support
- Give your HCW partner the benefit of the doubt and lower your expectations regarding their contribution to the family
- Provide them extra comfort and support—even if they are not able to accept it, even if it feels hard
 - Remember their calm surface may be the only protection they have against their anxieties and pain
- Do not make your partner your personal COVID-19 source of information

Engage in Practices to Ensure the Relationship Remains Healthy

- Respect transition time when your HCW leaves for work and returns home
- Maintain one or two rituals with your HCW family member—15 minutes COVID-free conversation, phone call on the way in to work, taking a walk together, mid-day text check-in
- Check in about each other's well-being
- Share what is happening in your respective lives
 - Talk about what you each have been doing, thinking, and feeling
 - Be honest with each other
 - Make clear that you have the resources to take care of yourself and that your sharing is in the service of honest and open connection
 - Find out what each other needs
- Engage in open conversation about time-sensitive issues
 - Discuss the change in balance of responsibilities and how this can best be addressed
 - Talk about changes in the relationship due to the impact of COVID-19 on



each person and how to mitigate against negative effects on the relationship

- Be sensitive and respond to one another's behavior, reactions, and moods and any changes that occur
 - Try to remember it's not personal
- Express your pride and your fears and worries
- Take time to do things that make you feel connected
- Talk about the things that connect you (kids, hobbies, fun memories, future hopes, ideas)
- Strive to create together as much normalcy as possible within the family

Helpful Resources

- How to support health care people working during coronavirus, by Nicole Pajer
 - https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-support-health-care-workers-coronavirus_1_5e6f840ac5b6747ef121c749?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly-93d3cuZ29vZ2xILmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKwCo1xPXK2uyoNMz_Zox-fArQYnIAXwhMn6tUGRHkA3EUzWJ-GLMDTv9hPyotzGm-w8seEQGqkqgZ19mSl-2vOrlxvWQM3dOknf2_QPc5syR29ur4NRAaeH2lqF2XEDx8x8MR_fMWg3tFN-0SUa7cZooyCQzU2Izokkg_BsHMKxHnI